BOOK REVIEW

The student's flora of Tasmania
Part 4A, Orchidaceae

Curtis, Winifred M. 'The Student's Flora of Tasmania, Part 4A, Angiospermae: Orchidaceae', 1980, Government Printer, Hobart.

A constant source of frustration to those working with Tasmanian plants is the lack of a complete up-to-date Flora for the region. The last complete account of the State's vascular flora was that of Rodway (1903), which has long been outdated, overtaken by new discoveries and numerous changes of name. For the Dicotyledons the gap has been filled by parts 1-3 of Dr. Curtis', 'Student's Flora', published between 1956 and 1967, but the march of progress overtook this work too, necessitating a new edition of part 1 in 1975 (jointly authored with Dennis Morris). Just as some people were wondering whether we would ever see the Monocotyledon volume, Part 4A dealing with the Orchidaceae has appeared, and the wait has been well worthwhile.

At first sight, it appears to be the formula as before, the book being bound (in the economy version) with the familiar brown utilitarian cardboard covers. Inside, however, there are a number of changes. This volume is printed in slightly larger type, making a significant difference in the ease with which it can be read, and for the first time there are coloured illustrations, in the form of photographs illustrating at least one species of each genus.

The amount of work that has gone into this volume, and its consequent value to Tasmanian botany is perhaps most graphically illustrated by the fact that it deals with 145 species in 24 genera, compared with the 79 species in 23 genera listed by Rodway. The only other recent account of Tasmanian orchids, Firth's 'Native Orchids of Tasmania' (1965) included 128 species, illustrating, if such were needed, the continuing high rate of discovery of novelties in the Tasmanian flora, and pointing out the potential for new finds if the necessary effort and resources can be found.

The keys, synonymies, distribution and comments about the taxa follow the same pattern as previous volumes, but the descriptions are slightly longer as a concession to the greater intricacy of the flowers. The descriptions, as in the earlier parts, are drawn up from living plants, making them particularly useful in the field. Pat Palmer's photographs are excellent, and almost make the generic key superfluous. They are supported by Dennis Morris' line drawings, again usually one per genus, and these show in most cases the habit at life size and a magnified detailed view of a single flower. It would have been desirable to have included more of these drawings, and perhaps more dissections and comparative charts (as is given on p. 41, where the columns of most *Thelymitra* species are illustrated) but presumably costs prevented this. The taxa are fully indexed, and arranged with regard to their similarities and relationships.

Inevitably a few minor typographic errors slipped in (e.g. misspelling of Abbreviations on p.ii, *Caladenia* instead of *Caladeniae* on p. 133; inconsistencies as in mycorrhiza and mycorhyzic on p.ii) but these are rare. Notes on nomenclature (3 new combinations, 1 new species name) appear at the end of the work, following the tradition established in earlier parts, but one might ask why the opportunity was not taken to describe formally the "interesting and spectacular" *Thelymitra* informally described on p. 45. Species delimitations in general seem to follow other recent treatments, with one notable exception. Dr. Curtis maintains *Pterostylis aphylla* as distinct from *P. parviflora* and gives for both a distribution of (Tas.), S.A., Vic., N.S.W., Qld. *P. aphylla* is not listed,

even as a synonym, in most mainland Floras (the exception is Willis, 1962) and I wonder on what evidence it is ascribed to those other States?

However these criticisms are of a very minor nature, and detract not at all from Dr Curtis' achievement. I am sure that botanists throughout Australia will wish "all speed to her pen", that we may soon be presented with Part 4B.

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